

JOHN WORTHINGTON

By Elizabeth Payne

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661

This man for the town of Worthington was named was born in Springfield on November 20, 1719. His father was Lt. John worthington, who came to Springfield from Hatfield in 1701. In 1729 he was an innholder. In 1812 he bought three tracts of land, located on both sides of Main Street between Bridge Street and what is now Worthington Street. The first tract, of 7 1/2 acres, became the Worthington homestead. Here he kept a tavern, said to be the finest in town.

His son John studied law at Yale, graduating in 1740. Father and son accumulated land holdings covered by 250 deeds. J.G. Holland says that as a lawyer he divided with Joseph Hawley of Northampton "the highest legal honors of old Hampshire County."

He was said to be a Tory, but must have been left undisturbed during the Revolution, for he died at 81 years of age on April 25, in 1800.

Why Plantation #3 was named for him remains a mystery. An early historian apparently recorded an error in an effort to explain the naming, and later historians repeated the error. The "History of the Town of Worthington" by James Clay Rice, printed in 1853, says: "Plantation #3.... was purchased by Col. Worthington of Springfield and Major Barnard of Deerfield for about \$1500. In honor of the former gentleman, who liberally induced the early settlers to occupy the land, by the erection of a church and a gristmill at his own expense, together with a generous assignment of ministerial and school lots for the use of the town, the plantation was called Worthington." (Note that he omits 3 other buyers.)

Gay's "Gazeteer of Hampshire County, Massachusetts, 1654-1887, uses these same words and adds: "He made the town a donation of 1200 acres of land. This was divided into 12 sections. One half of these were called ministerial lots, the other half school lots."

Not until 200 years after the settlement of the town were documents discovered which threw true light on this matter, not yet revealing why the town was named for Worthington, but providing a denial of the traditional explanation. These documents are called the "Edgerton Papers". They were brought to town by Dwight L. Edgerton on September 13, 1951. Mr. Edgerton (of 129 Little River Street, Springfield), the 81 years of age, said he had possessed "for about a quarter of a century" these papers, along with many old documents of other Connecticut Valley communities, which he was turning over to the proper authorities in the areas concerned.

These papers had been found by his wife in the old Hooker homestead when that structure was being demolished by the Springfield Street railway Company to make room for its car barns on North Main Street, Springfield. One account says that the Hookers were a family of lawyers, and Mrs. Edgerton was their friend. Mr. Edgerton found these papers in her desk after she died.

The papers of interest to Worthington cover the period of 1762-1772. They give the names of the five proprietors and records of their numerous meetings, with the actions taken. a plan of the township drawn up by the surveyor, Captain Nathaniel Dwight, the first division and assignment of lots, and the proprietors' petition, dated October 16, 1765, asking that Plantation #3 be incorporated into a town. There are bills for the construction of main roads, school, church, grist mill, bridges over streams, sawmill, etc. with signatures of workers acknowledging receipt of pay. There are maps also, including a map of the original English grant of the Plantation #3 area in 1763.

Mr. Edgerton painstakingly reinforced the brittle paper of these